

# Indigo Revolt

Certain events lead the way to the Indigo revolt in the Nadia district of Bengal. The indigo farmers protested to not grow indigo plantations. The policemen who tried to interfere were attacked by the indigo farmers. Out of anger, the planters increased the rents. The Barasat division of the districts Nadia and Pabna in April 1860, had a series of protests and strikes arranged by farmers who were refusing to grow indigo. Some parts of Bengal also experienced these farmer strikes.

The protests were supported by the Biswas brothers of Nadia, Rafiq Mondal from Malda, and Kader Molla from Pabna. The revolt also involved zamindars like Ramrattan Mullick of Narail. The government tried to oppress the revolt by slaughtering farmers and zamindars. Courageously, many Bengali intelligentsia, missionaries, and Muslims actively supported the revolt. The rural population favored the rebellion extensively. Journalism also stood for indigo farmers.

The “**NilDarpan**” play encouraged the Bengali intelligentsia to support the indigo farmers. A well-known writer – Michael Madhusudan Dutta worked on the translation of this play into English upon the authority of W S Seton-Karr, who was the Secretary to the Governor of Bengal. This play reflected the ordeals created by the Indigo rebellion.

## Spread of the Indigo Revolt

The Indigo Revolt was widely extended towards the villages of Chanugacha and Gobindapur in Krishnanagar, Nadia District under the leadership of Bishnucharan Biswas and Digambar Biswas in 1859.

Later, the Indigo revolt was popularised in the regions of Burdwan, Khulna, Birbhum, Pabna, Narail, and Murshidabad. In a public trial, some indigo planters were beheaded. The ryots used fire to destroy indigo depots. Many indigo planters hid for their life security. The Indigo rebellions' ryots also targeted the zamindars.

## Causes of the Indigo Revolt

There were numerous events that lead to the surge in the Indigo revolt. The Indigo planters forced peasants to grow indigo instead of crops. The loans named dadon were offered to the peasants, at exorbitant interest rates. If a farmer claimed this loan, he had to be in debt throughout his life. The peasants were paid a pittance of only 2.5 percent of the market price by the planters. The production of indigo was not at all beneficial to the farmers.

The poor farmers were forced and tortured for growing indigo unprotected from the indigo planters. If the peasants refused to do so, the indigo planters used to seize the property of the peasants. The planters were at ease because of the government policies

that worked in their favor. The act of 1833 allowed a free hand in oppression to the indigo planters. Most of the zamindars also supported the indigo planters.

## Indigo Revolt In Bengal

Generally, in October or November advances of two rupees per beegah were made. The Contract expected that the land had to be cultivated with indigo and then delivered to the factories. During the end of the manufacturing season, i.e. in August or September, other accounts were made. The cultivation of indigo mainly exploited the peasants. In 1859, the Nada district, Bidroha, and many other districts of Bengal found peasant protests. Walk through the points highlighting the significant events in the indigo revolt in Bengal.

- The peasants in despair attacked the factories with spears and swords in hand.
- The planters were beaten for charging high rents.
- Women were encouraged and supported the protest by throwing pots and pans at the planters.
- The most violent side of the Indigo rebellion protest was seen in Pabna District (the ryots directly denied indigo cultivation). The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal named J.P. Grant found that the villagers gathered at the riverbank of the Kalinga and Kumar rivers.
- They were praying and expecting an order or rule against indigo cultivation.
- The social unrest led to the establishment of a commission in March 1860 for analyzing the cons of this system.

## Two Major Forms of Indigo Cultivation

This **blue rebellion** sprang up in the summer of 1859 in Bengal. Thousands of ryots (peasants) protested for not growing indigo for the European indigo planters. In India, it is the most popular movement conducted by peasants also called Neel Bidroha. Since the 18th century, indigo cultivation has been seen. Indigo cultivation was practiced in two major forms: Nij- Abad and Ryoti.

- **Nij-Abad System**

In the Nij-Abad system, the planter produced indigo on the land that was directly controlled by him and the ryotwari system involved the cultivation of indigo on their land establishing a contract with the planters. Land Rights were given to the planters. These indigo planters borrowed unoccupied lands from the zamindars on a permanent or temporary basis. They were granted Taluqdari or Zamindari rights. The lands of the ryots who died with no heir or the ones who moved out of the village, upon such lands indigo was cultivated.

- **Ryoti System**

Predominantly, Ryoti was one of the well-known forms of indigo cultivation in Bengal. The Ryots followed the contract system for sowing the cash crop- indigo. The contracts were made for the period of one, three, five, and sometimes ten years. In the initial stage of the contract, the ryots were provided with advance payment to manage the expenses of cultivation. However, the ryot had to use his land for the cultivation of indigo.

## Significance of Indigo Revolt

The Indigo revolt was one of the significant revolts that shook the colonial government. Owing to the Indigo rebellion, the government began planning various policies towards the upliftment of peasants which marked the beginning of a new direction and approach towards the welfare of peasants. In 1860, the government had to set up the Indigo Commission. This commission looked after the hardships faced by the indigo farmers and helped them provide considerable relief.

The people who revolted became politically aroused and shrugged off their apathy. The Indigo revolt marked the inception of various wider political movements as it raised the tempo and motivated people to fight for their rights.

## Aftermath of Indigo Rebellion

The anger and dissatisfaction of the poor peasants had different forms of resistance. For instance, the revolt under Digambar and Bishnucharan was mainly an armed based conflict against the indigo planters. Most of the indigo-related riots were non-violent and passive. The Indigo revolt was impactful for the government as it set up the Indigo Commission in 1860. The rebellion against the British indigo planters in 1817 was led in the form of Champaran Satyagraha in Bihar.